Book Reviews

Naked marketing: How the 4Ps have destroyed business and what to do instead

Sue Nelson

Management Books, 2010; Softback; £14.99; 265pp;
ISBN: 978-1-852 526-35-1

Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice (2011) **12**, 296–298.
doi:10.1057/dddmp.2010.43

Great sub-title

I admit to having been seduced by the title — or more particularly the subtitle: it is high time that this hoary old pillar of marketing teaching was dismantled and consigned to the scrap-heap. A book that seemed dedicated to doing just that started off with high marks as far as I was concerned. Whether a book that goes on to promote, as a replacement for the 4Ps, an utterly unmemorable acronym (ISAIH) is, after all, such a good thing, is altogether another matter.

The welcome end of one ancient model

But to start at the beginning, in her first 50 pages, the author describes the 4Ps (Product, Price, Promotion and Place — this last a rather desperate attempt to find a word beginning with P which could stand for Distribution) and criticizes them as a description of, and a model for, the marketing process. The gravamen of her charge is that the 4Ps constitute a 50-year-old supply-side model, which presupposes a totally outdated (if it ever truly existed) marketplace where all the action comes from the vendor, and the customer, if noticed at all, is a passive recipient. She notes a latter-day attempt by Robert Lauterborn to replace the 4Ps by 4Cs (Customer solution, Cost to the customer, Communication and Convenience), and an attempt to retro-fit the original model by adding a further three Ps (People, Process and Physical evidence), or perhaps yet another (Partnership). All this she dismisses as unhelpful, illogical and irrelevant to present-day needs and circumstances.

So far so good. Except that, underneath all these pragmatic objections to the 4Ps and their derivatives lies an even more fundamental question: why do we feel the need to teach marketing by numbers in the first place?

The numbers approach to marketing teaching

This ‘need’ is remarkably widespread. It is particularly noticeable in these huge American tomes on direct marketing, which are all full of 263 new ways to achieve something or another. But we find it nearer home as well: I note in the Table of Contents of one of my otherwise favourite books (*Commonsense Direct Marketing* by Drayton Bird) the following: The Three Graces of direct marketing; five major objectives...and four ways to achieve them; three major errors; eleven steps to success; five questions...; five major differences; the seven media; ten good deals; two secret ingredients; fourteen pointers...; eleven uncreative ways...; thirteen attention grabbers; thirteen ways

you can learn by testing; two laws of testing; nine key areas; two types of relationship. It's as though nothing can be said (even in Drayton's pellucid prose) unless it's firmly pinned to a number in some great laundry list in direct marketing heaven. (But one should never underestimate Drayton: is all this just ironic?)

And the same thing is true of the acronyms that can be found littering marketing textbooks, such as that ancient model for constructing (an apt word) a direct mail letter, AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action). How can one effectively write a direct mail letter (or any other kind of letter come to that) by formula? How about spontaneity, warmth, humour? And nestling within these pages can be found references to SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) and PEST (Political, Economic, Social, Technological), the Boston Matrix, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and other old favourites of the academic mafia who love to trot them out, year after year, as a substitute for original thought.

And the acronym thing

Actually, the reason for this numbers/acronym thing is simple when you think about it: it's not for the benefit of the students of marketing at all, but for the benefit of the teachers: each successive number, each following letter of the acronym is an instructor's aide-memoire — a convenient clothes-peg if you will, from which to hang the next paragraph of the lesson. Thus my underlying complaint about the 4Ps is not just that they are a *supply-side* model in a customer-dominated era, but that they are a *model* at all. Teachers, and text-books, build models and lists — the activity appeals to their tidy minds, and looks good on the page. Real marketers don't model marketing — they do it, and it's rarely tidy.

Marketing models? Why?

Here we go again...

Which brings me back to our book (with apologies if you thought I had forgotten it). Having disposed of the 4Ps, claiming that this Emperor is wearing no clothes, the author immediately proposes to fit him out in a smart new suit of an acronym, rather pompously called the Isaiah Logic Model. ISALIAH stands for Insight, Solution development, Awareness, Information gathering, Assessment, Handover. It represents, just like the 4Ps, only much less memorisably, a sequential series of criteria to be considered in any marketing context.

Having recovered from the disappointment of seeing the despatch of one model followed by the immediate arrival of another, I do have to say that what follows is, for the most part, sensible enough. The author's thesis is that all marketing — and indeed all company activity — must be customer-centric; this is right in line with accepted current thinking, and wholly out of line with actual current practice, and thus it's fair enough to press the point yet again.

Customer-centricity

Therefore, Insight has to mean insight into 'your customers' attitudes, behaviours, lifestyle, life stage, preferences, spending power and views'; Solution development is about developing solutions to your customers' needs; Awareness means creating consumer awareness of your company or message; Information gathering involves giving the *customer* the *opportunity* to obtain information about your product or service; Assessment is the customer's assessment of the value to

How the book is constructed

him/her of your offer; Handover is the moment at which the customer takes ownership of your product or service.

Each letter in the acronym is dealt with in a separate Part; within each Part is an explanation of the concept, followed typically by Sections on how to achieve or develop this concept, the tools available for the purpose, and some real-life examples of how (or how not) to do it. There is some rather tedious repetition of examples, but on the whole they are welcome. The tone and style of the text is low-key and fairly simplistic; it's not intellectually demanding, and the successive sections are for the most part short and snappy enough to avoid boredom. Seasoned marketers, who have now got beyond the 4Ps stage (and so long as they aren't still teaching it, like the Chartered Institute of Marketing) won't (or shouldn't) learn a great deal from this book, but it should make a not too demanding, sometimes thought-provoking and reasonably comprehensive introduction to marketing for newcomers, or aspirants, to the discipline. It does cover a lot of ground in a mere 250 pages, and contains useful lists of further reading.

A good read for newcomers

Occasionally, the author does get it wrong. And she does exaggerate: you can't know *everything* about your customers (or about *a* customer — the distinction is not always made clearly enough) — nor should you want to. Nor, in distinguishing between 'push' marketing (vendor initiated) and 'pull' marketing (customer initiated) and noting, correctly, that the balance is swinging from the former to the latter, should she dismiss the former as old hat and worthless; not all Emperors are naked, or not all the time. And her attempt, in Part 9, to redefine marketing is a minor disaster.

Shortcomings**Good in parts**

All in all, this is a useful book for this generation. The ground that it covers, and the advice that it gives should assure it of a place on many marketing bookshelves. It would have been just as useful and somewhat easier to read if it had not been lumbered with, and constructed around, another pointless acronym — but we should, like the apocryphal curate, be grateful for the good parts, and not hold our noses too visibly over the rest.

Robin Fairlie Hon F IDM

Consumerology

Philip Graves,
Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London, 2010; 216pp;
Hardback; £20 (£11.18 at Amazon);
ISBN: 978-185788-550-7

Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice (2011) **12**, 298–303.
doi:10.1057/dddmp.2010.44

A declaration of interest

Let me start with a declaration of interest. I've been in market research for a long time — since 1971. Not just as a client-side practitioner,